

Lovers of the sport of ballroom dancing enjoy many aspects of the dance, one of them being the vast diversity of dances available. While offering a great amount of interest to the sport, this diversity can also be overwhelming to the beginner. We find that not only newcomers have questions in regards to all of the dances available. Hopefully, this article will attempt to explain and break down the different styles, as well as the dances within each style.

**Q: What makes up Ballroom Dancing?**

A: Ballroom Dance is a term loosely used by social dancers to describe all of the dances commonly played at social dances. The following chart is a more accurate breakdown of the various dances and styles.

There are two major categories or styles referred to as **American** and **International**.

Both of these styles are popular in the U.S. Major Competitions most often include both styles with some couples concentrating on one or the other. Each style has within it what are referred to as the *smooth* or *standard* dances and the *Latin* or *rhythm* dances. The following outline will provide a visual of how the dances are categorized.

**American Style**

*American Smooth*

\*Fox Trot, \*Tango, \*Waltz, \*Viennese Waltz

*American Rhythm*

\*Bolero, \*Cha Cha, \*Mambo, \*Rumba, \*Swing

**International Style**

*International Standard (aka Ballroom)*

\*Fox Trot, \*Quickstep, \*Tango, \*Waltz, \*Viennese Waltz

*International Latin*

\*Cha Cha, \*Jive, \*Paso Doble, \*Rumba, \*Samba

You will notice from the above outline that there is some overlap of the names of the dances so you might ask:

**Q: What is the difference between American and International Style dancing?**

A: The categories differ by the steps allowed in each dance and the styling employed in dancing the steps. International Standard is distinctive in that it is danced in a closed dance position with a focus on a perfectly positioned top-line. American Smooth demands the same attention when in closed positions but also allows the partnership to break the closed hold and infuse flamboyant arm styling into their movements.

International Latin is distinctive in that the hip action is achieved after stepping onto a "straight leg," as opposed to American Rhythm in which the Cuban motion (hip action) is achieved by flexing the knee after taking a step.

**Q: Do I need special shoes for this type of dancing?**

A: Regulation dance shoes for Smooth/Standard and Latin/Rhythm dancing are the best since they provide the proper amount of "slip" versus traction and they are flexible enough to allow proper toe points and ability to rise onto the ball of the foot. Your shoes are your equipment and are therefore very important to your sport of dancing. A good pair of dance shoes can last you many years. If you are serious about learning the art well a quality pair of shoes is imperative.

Ladies Shoes for Latin or Rhythm dances: Professional Ladies and higher level amateur dancers may dance in a 2 ½ or 3 inch heel. Some amateur ladies prefer to wear a lower heel, especially for social dances or practice. It's not unheard of to see amateur dancers in lower heels, particularly youths, beginners, and older dancers.

Ladies Shoes for Standard or Smooth dances: Ladies dancing in the Standard or Smooth categories wear 2½ or 3 inch heels. Closed toe pumps are used for Standard and closed toe shoes with straps may be used for American Smooth. Again certain amateurs and youths may wear lower heels even when competing. The shoes are most often a nude satin but occasionally they may be dyed to match the dress.

Mens' shoes for Latin or Rhythm dances: Men may wear a 1 inch, 1½ inch, 1¾ inch Cuban heel, for the Latin/Rhythm dances. Men's shoes must match the trousers. With black trousers wear black leather and for all other color trousers shoes are generally dyed to match the trousers. There are few exceptions to this rule such as character dances or routines which may call for other choices to artistically match the theme of the routine.

Mens shoes for Standard or Smooth dances: Men wear a 1 inch heel and for competition the shoes must be patent leather.

Shoes for social dances are not subject to these strict rules. However, one should own a quality pair of comfortable dance shoes even for social dancing, practice, and lessons. It is not advisable to dance in street shoes and it is considered ill mannered to wear street shoes on most ballroom dance floors. Dancers wear their shoes only on the dance floor and every effort is made to keep the floor as clean as possible.

Ballroom dancing, of course, is not the only type of dancing which can be done with a partner. Some of the other types of ***Partner Dances*** are listed in the chart on the following page. Ask your instructor if you are interested in exploring any of these dances.

## Dances in addition to the 9 American Style and 10 International Style Dances:

DANCE	STYLE	ORIGIN	NOTES
Argentine Tango	Form of tango	Argentina & Uruguay 1850 to 1890	
Balboa	Form of swing	Southern California 1920's, 1930's	Considered to be more of a "dancers dance than a spectator's dance"
Charleston	Form of Swing		
Collegiate Shag	Form of swing	1920's, 1930's Carolinas	
Country & Western Two Step	Aka: Texas Two Step		Danced to country music
Country Cha Cha			figures similar to Latin and rhythm steplists, also includes figures common to the C&W
Country Waltz			Waltz done to country music, using some figures more identifiable to the country western style of dancing.
English Country Dancing	Folk dance background	1650 Renaissance England	Little is known before the middle of the 17 <sup>th</sup> century.
Fixed Pattern Partner Dancing	Dances such as the Schottische are Shuffle examples.		Easy to learn dances with fixed patterns which repeat. Usually this term refers to C&W styles.
Hustle		Late 1960's, early 1970's 1973 New York City at The Grand Ballroom	
Lindy	Form of swing, influenced by Charleston and tap dance.	1920's, 1930's Harlem, NY, USA Savoy Ballroom, NY	Blending of African rhythms and movements with European structured dances. Savoy style became popular.
Merengue		Dominican Republic Slaves chained at ankles had to walk dragging a leg.	Style of music and dance
Night Club Two Step	Aka: California Two Step or Disco Two Step	1960's by Buddy Schwimmer	
Polka	Czech peasant dance, attributed to Anna Slezakova	1834 -1850's Bohemia, Czech Republic	"Polka" means polish woman first danced by Anna to "Uncle Nimra bought a white horse".
Round Dancing	Choreographed and cued ballroom dancing		Similar to Sequence dancing.
Salsa	From cha cha, mambo, swing and hustle	1970's New York City, USA	Strong influence from Latin America, (ie: Cuba and Puerto Rico)
Scottish Dancing	Derived from early British forms of country dancing.	1750's Scotland	Dancers form "sets", dancing repeated patterns to particular pieces of music.
Sequence Dancing	All ballroom dancing except for waltz was once sequence dancing.	Prior to the 1820's England	Choreographed and cued ballroom. See also Round Dancing.
Shag	A form of swing, little apple, jitterbug	1937 Carolinas, Southeast US	Three forms exist: Carolina Shag, Collegiate Shag, St. Louis Shag
Square Dancing	Derives from English Country Dancing		Couples form sets and dance fixed patterns to a caller's cues.